

Documents on Diplomacy: The Source

The Art of Diplomacy *A Dispatch from Charles Francis Adams to Secretary Seward, No. 2* *Legation of the United States, London, May 21, 1861*

Sir: At the close of my last dispatch I stated my purpose to ask an early interview with Lord John Russell. . . I found his lordship ready to receive me, so that I proceeded at once to business. After expressing the general feeling which I believed prevailing in the United States of good will toward Great Britain, and the confident expectations I had entertained, down to the period of my arrival, that these sentiments were fully reciprocated to my government on the part of the government here, I signified my sense of disappointment in not finding this quite so equivocally manifested as I had hoped. There were now fewer topics of direct difference between the two countries than had probably existed at any preceding time, and even these had been withdrawn from discussion at this place to be treated on the other side of the water. I therefore came out here with little to do beyond the duty of preserving the relations actually existing from the risk of being unfavorably affected by the unfortunate domestic disturbances prevailing in my own country. It was not without pain that I was compelled to admit that from the day of my arrival I had felt in the proceedings of both houses of Parliament, in the language of her Majesty's ministers, and in the tone of opinion prevailing in private circles, more of uncertainty about this than I had before thought possible. This sentiment alone would have impelled me to solicit an early interview; but I was now come under a much stronger motive. I had just received a dispatch from my government, based upon a letter from Mr. Dallas, of much earlier date than any of the matters to which I had alluded. In that letter he had reported a conversation with his lordship, the close of which had been deemed so unsatisfactory that I had been directed at once to seek a further elucidation of his meaning. It was the desire of my government to learn whether it was the intention of her Majesty's ministers to adopt a policy which would have the effect to widen, if not to make irreparable, a breach which we believed yet to be entirely manageable by ourselves.

At this point his lordship replied by saying that there was no such intention. The clearest evidence of that was to be found in the assurance given by him to Mr. Dallas in the earlier part of the conversation referred to. With regard to the other portion, against which I understood him to intimate he had already heard from Lord Lyons that the President had taken exception, he could only say that he hardly saw his way to bind the government to any specific course, when circumstances beyond their agency rendered it difficult to tell what might happen. Should the insurgent States ultimately succeed in establishing themselves in an independent position, of the probability of which he desired to express no opinion, he presumed from the general course of the United States heretofore, that they did not mean to require of other countries to pledge themselves to go further than they had been in the habit of going themselves. He therefore, by what he had said to Mr. Dallas, simply meant to say that they were not disposed in any way to interfere. . . .

. . . I returned once more to the charge, and asked him what answer I should return to the inquiry which I had been directed to make. In order to avoid any ambiguity, I took out of my pocket your dispatch No. 4, and read to him the paragraph recapitulating the substance of Mr. Dallas's report of his interview, and the very last paragraph. I said that it was important to me that I should not make any mistake in reporting this part of the conversation; therefore I should beg him to furnish me with the precise language. He said that he did not know what he was to say. If it was expected of him to give any pledge of an absolute nature that his government would not at any future time, no matter what the circumstances might be, recognized an existing State in America, it was more than he could promise. If I wished an exact reply, my better way would be to address him the inquiry in writing. I said that I was well aware of that, but I had hoped that I might be saved the necessity of doing so. On reflection, he proposed to avoid that by offering to transmit to Lord Lyons directions to give such a reply to the President as, in

his own opinion, might be satisfactory. To this arrangement I gave my assent, though not without some doubt whether I was doing right. In truth, if I were persuaded that her Majesty's government were really animated by a desire to favor the rebellion, I should demand a categorical answer; but thus far I see rather division of opinion, consequent upon the pressure of the commercial classes. Hence I preferred to give the short time demanded, as well as to place in the hands of the President himself the power to decide upon the sufficiency of the reply. . . .

It may be as well to state that, both in matter and manner, the conference, which has been reported as fully and as accurately as my memory would permit, was conducted in the most friendly spirit. . .

I have the honor to be, sir, your obedient servant,

CHARLES FRANCIS ADAMS

Source

United States Department of State, *Message of the President of the United States to the two houses of Congress, at the commencement of the second session of the thirty-seventh congress*, Vol. I [Washington, D.C.: 1861]

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